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APPLICATION NO.	FILING DATE	FIRST NAMED INVENTOR	ATTORNEY DOCKET NO.	CONFIRMATION NO.
10/562,400	04/25/2006	Hiroshi Kannan	010986.57272US	8481

23911 7590 12/04/2008
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EXAMINER

DAHIMENE, MAHMOUD

ART UNIT	PAPER NUMBER
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1792

MAIL DATE	DELIVERY MODE
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12/04/2008

PAPER

Please find below and/or attached an Office communication concerning this application or proceeding.

The time period for reply, if any, is set in the attached communication.

Office Action Summary	Application No. 10/562,400	Applicant(s) KANNAN ET AL.	
	Examiner MAHMOUD DAHIMENE	Art Unit 1792	

-- The MAILING DATE of this communication appears on the cover sheet with the correspondence address --

Period for Reply

A SHORTENED STATUTORY PERIOD FOR REPLY IS SET TO EXPIRE 3 MONTH(S) OR THIRTY (30) DAYS, WHICHEVER IS LONGER, FROM THE MAILING DATE OF THIS COMMUNICATION.

- Extensions of time may be available under the provisions of 37 CFR 1.136(a). In no event, however, may a reply be timely filed after SIX (6) MONTHS from the mailing date of this communication.
- If NO period for reply is specified above, the maximum statutory period will apply and will expire SIX (6) MONTHS from the mailing date of this communication.
- Failure to reply within the set or extended period for reply will, by statute, cause the application to become ABANDONED (35 U.S.C. § 133). Any reply received by the Office later than three months after the mailing date of this communication, even if timely filed, may reduce any earned patent term adjustment. See 37 CFR 1.704(b).

Status

- 1) ☒ Responsive to communication(s) filed on 21 October 2008.
- 2a) ☒ This action is **FINAL**. 2b) ☐ This action is non-final.
- 3) ☐ Since this application is in condition for allowance except for formal matters, prosecution as to the merits is closed in accordance with the practice under *Ex parte Quayle*, 1935 C.D. 11, 453 O.G. 213.

Disposition of Claims

- 4) ☒ Claim(s) 1-4,9-12 and 14-82 is/are pending in the application.
- 4a) Of the above claim(s) _____ is/are withdrawn from consideration.
- 5) ☐ Claim(s) _____ is/are allowed.
- 6) ☒ Claim(s) 1-4,9-12 and 14-82 is/are rejected.
- 7) ☐ Claim(s) _____ is/are objected to.
- 8) ☐ Claim(s) _____ are subject to restriction and/or election requirement.

Application Papers

- 9) ☐ The specification is objected to by the Examiner.
- 10) ☐ The drawing(s) filed on _____ is/are: a) ☐ accepted or b) ☐ objected to by the Examiner.
Applicant may not request that any objection to the drawing(s) be held in abeyance. See 37 CFR 1.85(a).
Replacement drawing sheet(s) including the correction is required if the drawing(s) is objected to. See 37 CFR 1.121(d).
- 11) ☐ The oath or declaration is objected to by the Examiner. Note the attached Office Action or form PTO-152.

Priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119

- 12) ☐ Acknowledgment is made of a claim for foreign priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119(a)-(d) or (f).
- a) ☐ All b) ☐ Some * c) ☐ None of:
1. ☐ Certified copies of the priority documents have been received.
 2. ☐ Certified copies of the priority documents have been received in Application No. _____.
 3. ☐ Copies of the certified copies of the priority documents have been received in this National Stage application from the International Bureau (PCT Rule 17.2(a)).

* See the attached detailed Office action for a list of the certified copies not received.

Attachment(s)

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Notice of References Cited (PTO-892) | 4) <input type="checkbox"/> Interview Summary (PTO-413)
Paper No(s)/Mail Date. _____ |
| 2) <input type="checkbox"/> Notice of Draftsperson's Patent Drawing Review (PTO-948) | 5) <input type="checkbox"/> Notice of Informal Patent Application |
| 3) <input type="checkbox"/> Information Disclosure Statement(s) (PTO/SB/08)
Paper No(s)/Mail Date _____ | 6) <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

DETAILED ACTION

Claim Rejections - 35 USC § 112

1. The following is a quotation of the second paragraph of 35 U.S.C. 112:

The specification shall conclude with one or more claims particularly pointing out and distinctly claiming the subject matter which the applicant regards as his invention.
2. Claims 6-8 are rejected, they depends on claim 5, which has been canceled, they recites the limitation "said concentration". There is insufficient antecedent basis for this limitation in the claims.
3. Claims 14-15 are rejected because they depend on claim 13 which has been canceled.

Claim Rejections - 35 USC § 103

1. The following is a quotation of 35 U.S.C. 103(a) which forms the basis for all obviousness rejections set forth in this Office action:

(a) A patent may not be obtained though the invention is not identically disclosed or described as set forth in section 102 of this title, if the differences between the subject matter sought to be patented and the prior art are such that the subject matter as a whole would have been obvious at the time the invention was made to a person having ordinary skill in the art to which said subject matter pertains. Patentability shall not be negated by the manner in which the invention was made.
1. This application currently names joint inventors. In considering patentability of the claims under 35 U.S.C. 103(a), the examiner presumes that the subject matter of the various claims was commonly owned at the time any inventions covered therein were made absent any evidence to the contrary. Applicant is advised of the obligation under 37 CFR 1.56 to point out the inventor and invention dates of each claim that was

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not commonly owned at the time a later invention was made in order for the examiner to consider the applicability of 35 U.S.C. 103(c) and potential 35 U.S.C. 102(e), (f) or (g) prior art under 35 U.S.C. 103(a).

2. Claims 1-4, 6-8, 9-10, 63-65, 67-69, 77, 79, 80, 81, 82, are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Sorensen et al. (US 2003/0129106) in view of Selbrede et al. (US 2002/0020429) and Steinwandel et al. (US 5,782,085).

Regarding claims 1-4, Sorensen discloses a semiconductor processing system wherein a plasma is generated in a toroidal plasma generator, said toroidal plasma generator comprising a gas passage having a gas entrance (120a) and a gas outlet (120b), said gas passage forming a circuitous path (104), citing a coil (200) wound around a part of the gas passage (204) as an option for the toroidal plasma source (paragraph 0046), characterized in that said method comprises the steps of supplying a mixed gas of an Ar gas and an NF₃ gas. The plasma will dissociate the NF₃ gas to produce radicals from the NF₃ molecule. Sorensen discloses "in many applications, use of a carrier gas mixed with the precursor gas may be undesirable. This would be particularly true in semiconductor processing chambers that do not use the carrier gas for the substrate processing. For example, argon may be incompatible with many processing chambers. In accordance with one aspect of the present invention, because of the efficient coupling between the primary coil 16 and the secondary winding of the toroidal vessel 18 of the illustrated embodiment, the use of such carrier gasses to help initiate or stabilize the plasma can be reduced or eliminated. Thus, an argon-free flow of activated NF₃ may be provided by the plasma source 12 during both startup and

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operation.” (paragraph 0043). “For efficient operation, the internal pressure of the toroidal vessel 18 is held at a pressure suitable for the particular application. Typical pressures are in the range of 0.1 to 20 Torr.” (paragraph 0044), this pressure range overlaps applicant’s claimed range of 6.65 to 66.5 Pa (50 to 500 mTorr). Overlapping ranges are held obvious.

It is noted that Sorensen does not expressly disclose a gas mixture containing a specific range of said NF₃ gas in argon, and igniting plasma being conducted under a total pressure of 6.65 to 66.5Pa. However, Sorensen discloses “In accordance with one aspect of the present invention, because of the efficient coupling between the primary coil 16 and the secondary winding of the toroidal vessel 18 of the illustrated embodiment, the use of such carrier gasses to help initiate or stabilize the plasma can be reduced or eliminated. Thus, an argon-free flow of activated NF₃ may be provided by the plasma source 12 during both **startup** and operation.” (paragraph 0043). **Clearly Sorensen suggests NF₃ without argon is harder to ignite than an Ar/NF₃ gas mixture.** In addition Selbrede teaches Ar/NF₃ gas flow ratio are conventionally known to be variable process parameter varying essentially from 0% to 100%.

Therefore, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the invention was made to modify the process of Sorensen to include argon in the NF₃ gas in any proportions including at least 5 % NF₃, or a concentration of 5% or more but not exceeding 45%, or a concentration of 10% or more but not exceeding 45%, or a concentration of 20% or more but not exceeding 45%, in a mixed gas of

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argon gas and NF₃ because any amount of argon would have made plasma ignition easier according to Sorensen since it has been held that discovering an optimum value of a result effective variable involves only routine skill in the art.

One of ordinary skill in the art would have been motivated to use at least 5% NF₃ when little fluorine active species are needed in the process, argon being an inert non-reactive carrier gas. It has been held that there is no invention where the difference in proportions is not critical and was ascertained by routine experimentation because the determination of workable ranges is not considered inventive. As to the ignition pressure Sorensen provides a working range of 0.1 to 20 Torr for which, an argon-free or (when argon is acceptable in the process) an argon containing flow of activated NF₃ may be provided by the plasma source 12 during both startup and operation. Applicant did not show unexpected results in generating an ar/NF₃ plasma at the claimed gas ratios and pressure range.

Sorensen suggests cleaning method for cleaning a processing vessel evacuated by an evacuating system 56 and coupled with a remote plasma source 18, said remote plasma source comprising a toroidal plasma generator, said toroidal plasma generator comprising a gas passage having a gas entrance 120a and a gas outlet 120b, said gas passage forming a circuitous path (figure 1), and a coil wound around a part of said gas passage, characterized in that said cleaning method comprises the steps of: forming radicals containing F in said remote plasma source; and supplying said radicals to an interior of said processing vessel 14 and cleaning said interior of said processing vessel by said radicals, said step of forming said radicals comprising the steps of: supplying a

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mixed gas containing at least 5% of NF₃ in an Ar gas to said gas passage as a cleaning gas with a first pressure in which plasma can ignite and igniting plasma by driving said coil by a high-frequency power.

Selbrede discloses “the power required to **ignite and sustain** a plasma in the Remote Plasma Cleaning (RPC) chamber 212 is a function of the pressure of the gas from which the plasma is generated, lowering the pressure within the RPC chamber 212 reduces the power required to sustain the plasma.” (paragraph 0048), including in an NF₃/ar mixture (paragraph 0070)(figure 12).

It is noted that neither Selbrede nor Sorensen expressly disclose increasing the gas pressure after ignition of the plasma, However, Selbrede clearly teaches lowering the pressure facilitates plasma ignition. Therefor, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the invention was made to modify the process of Sorensen to decrease the pressure in order to facilitate plasma ignition because Selbrede clearly teaches lowering the pressure facilitates plasma ignition, also, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the invention was made to increase the pressure back to the processing pressure after the plasma has been ignited since Steinwandel teaches that reducing pressure for the purpose of plasma ignition is a known plasma ignition scheme. Steinwandel teaches “It is furthermore possible to superimpose **a brief** high-frequency pulse (with a pulse width of about 1 msec) on the stationary excitation field **or to reduce pressure** in order to ignite the plasma (breakdown).” (column 5, line 55). The reference of Steinwandel is not relied on to teach plasma jet processing, but it is relied on to teach that temporarily reducing

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pressure or temporarily increasing the excitation field are known methods for facilitating plasma ignition.

One of ordinary skill in the art would have been motivated to ignite the plasma at a lower pressure in order to facilitate plasma ignition as suggested by Steinwandel.

It would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the invention was made to modify the process of Sorensen to increase a total pressure of said mixed gas, after plasma ignition has been facilitated with reduced pressure, by increasing the flow in said gas passage to a second pressure while maintaining said plasma, said cleaning step cleaning said interior of said processing vessel at said second pressure because Selbrede teaches the power required to **ignite and sustain** a plasma in the Remote Plasma Cleaning (RPC) chamber 212 is a function of the pressure of the gas from which the plasma is generated.

One of ordinary skill in the art would have been motivated to increase the total pressure of the gas mixture back to the preferred operating processing pressure, after plasma ignition, in order to obtain higher active cleaning species density due to higher pressure which also means higher molecular active density in the processing region.

As to claims 6-8, as discussed above, Selbrede teaches Ar/NF₃ gas flow ratio are conventionally known to be variable process parameter varying essentially from 0% to 100%.

As to claims 9-10, it is noted that Sorensen does not expressly disclose changing the gas pressure and flow after plasma ignition as required in the claims.

However, Selbrede discloses “the power required to **ignite and sustain** a plasma in the Remote Plasma Cleaning (RPC) chamber 212 is a function of the pressure of the gas from which the plasma is generated, lowering the pressure within the RPC chamber 212 reduces the power required to sustain the plasma.” (paragraph 0048), including in an NF₃/ar mixture (paragraph 0070)(figure 12).

Therefore, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the invention was made to modify the process of Sorensen to increase pressure after plasma ignition because Selbrede teaches the power required to **ignite and sustain** a plasma in the Remote Plasma Chamber (RPC) chamber 212 is a function of the pressure of the gas from which the plasma is generated, lowering the pressure within the RPC chamber 212 reduces the power required to sustain the plasma.

One of ordinary skill in the art would have been motivated to increase pressure after plasma ignition in order to obtain ignition at the lowest possible power, then adjust the pressure (by increasing it) to the desired process condition. As to the pressure changes and gas flow, Selbrede teaches “FIG. 12 also shows a graph of exemplary remote plasma chamber power as a function of NF₃ addition to a constant Ar carrier gas flow of 1,000 sccm and a process chamber pressure of 1 Torr. The graph shows that when no NF₃ is present in the feed the plasma generator operates at approximately 250 watts. When NF₃ is increased from 10 to 1000 sccm the remote power supply also increases the power supplied to the plasma where a flow of 1,000 sccm requires about 2,700 watts.” (paragraph 0071). Selbrede teaches a flow

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range overlapping applicant's flow range as described in claims 9-10. Overlapping ranges are held obvious.

Claim Rejections - 35 USC § 103

1. Claims 6-8, 17-30, 33, 49-51, 53, 54, 55, 66, 70-72, 74-76 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Sorensen et al. (US 2003/0129106) in view of Selbrede et al. (US 2002/0020429), Steinwandel et al. (US 5,782,085) and further in view of Knipp (US 5,288,971).

The references of Sorensen et al. (US 2003/0129106), Selbrede et al. (US 2002/0020429), Steinwandel et al. (US 5,782,085) have been discussed above.

Selbrede discloses "the power required to **ignite and sustain** a plasma in the Remote Plasma Cleaning (RPC) chamber 212 is a function of the pressure of the gas from which the plasma is generated, lowering the pressure within the RPC chamber 212 reduces the power required to sustain the plasma." (paragraph 0048), including in an NF3/ar mixture (paragraph 0070)(figure 12). Therefore, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the invention was made to modify the process of Sorensen to increase pressure after plasma ignition because Selbrede teaches the power required to **ignite and sustain** a plasma in the Remote Plasma Chamber (RPC) chamber 212 is a function of the pressure of the gas from which the plasma is generated, lowering the pressure within the RPC chamber 212 reduces the power required to sustain the plasma.

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2. It is noted that Sorensen does not expressly disclose increasing the total pressure after ignition.

3. Knipp teaches "Ignition point (22) is a function of gas pressure, electrode spacing and size, and other chamber characteristics. The relationship between pressure and ignition voltage is referred to in the industry as a Paschen curve and is shown in FIG. 5. The Paschen voltage (14) decreases as pressure is decreased until it reaches a minimum value (13) which correlates to a certain pressure. Below this pressure, the Paschen voltage (14) again increases. Perhaps because the Paschen curve has been well studied, solutions utilizing **pressure increases** as in U.S. Pat. No. 4,906,811 are often utilized." (column 5, line 12) .

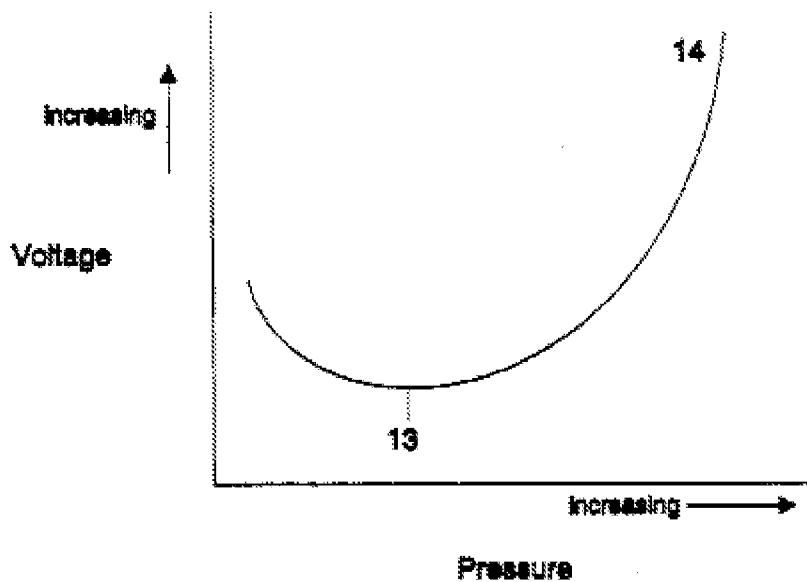


Figure 5

The reference of Knipp is not relied on to teach increasing pressure after plasma ignition, but Knipp is relied on to teach that, according to the Paschen curve, for every gas or gas mixture there is a minimum voltage for plasma ignition, this minimum depends on the pressure (and other parameters).

Therefore, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the invention was made to modify the process of Sorensen to perform plasma ignition at the pressure where the ignition voltage (power) is at minimum. One of ordinary skill in the art would have been motivated to choose minimum voltage plasma ignition in order to obtain a reliable ignition process avoiding higher ignition voltages

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which can lead to arcing and damaging the high frequency voltage circuit. Then, if the desirable plasma process pressure is at the right hand side (14) of minimum voltage ignition point (13) in figure 5 of Knipp, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the invention to increase the pressure from (13), after plasma ignition, to arrive at the desired process pressure (14).

As to claims 18-30 Sorensen discloses "For efficient operation, the internal pressure of the toroidal vessel 18 is held at a pressure suitable for the particular application. Typical pressures are in the range of 0.1 to 20 Torr. In some applications it may be desirable to maintain the pressure as high as feasible. In other words, the pressure differential between the vessel 18 and the deposition chamber may be made as large as possible and may be at least, for example, 4.5 Torr. The pressure in the toroidal vessel 18 may be higher, for example, in the range of about 5 Torr to about 20 Torr, and in particular may be about 15 Torr. The pressure in the deposition chamber may be, for example, in the range of about 0.1 Torr to about 2 Torr, and in particular about 0.5 Torr. A flow restrictor 150 is employed to allow a high pressure plasma to be maintained without detrimentally affecting the pressure of deposition chamber 30. The flow restrictor 150 may be, for example, a small orifice or a series of small orifices, although any device that creates a pressure differential, such as a reduction valve or a needle valve, could be employed. The flow restrictor 150 may be placed at or near the point at which the pipe 140 enters deposition chamber 30." (paragraph 0044).

As to claim 33, Sorensen teaches, "Although the invention has been explained and illustrated in terms of embodiments that involved a PECVD system, the invention

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has far wider applicability. For example, the concept of a remote activation source (i.e., outside the main vacuum chamber), possibly used in conjunction with a local activation source (i.e., inside the main vacuum chamber) is useful in systems designed for the purposes of physical vapor deposition (PVD), chemical vapor deposition (CVD), ion doping, stripping of photoresist, substrate cleaning, **plasma etching**, and other purposes as well” (paragraph 0054). Sorensen clearly suggests using the same plasma generation apparatus for plasma etching application, NF₃/Ar gas mixture is an etching gas mixture conventionally used for silicon substrate etching.

Claim Rejections - 35 USC § 103

3. Claims 11-12, 78, are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Sorensen et al. (US 2003/0129106) in view of Selbrede et al. (US 2002/0020429), Steinwandel et al. (US 5,782,085) and further in view of Ishikawa et al. (US 2002/0000198).

Sorensen discloses “For example, in a tungsten deposition system a fluorine compound gas is typically used to etch away tungsten deposited on the walls of the system to effect cleaning of those walls” (paragraph 052).

It is noted that Sorensen does not expressly disclose F₂ as the fluorine compound gas. All other limitations have been addressed above in reference to Sorensen et al. (US 2003/0129106) in view of Selbrede et al. (US 2002/0020429), and Steinwandel et al. (US 5,782,085)

Ishikawa disclose "For the remote microwave cleaning system of FIG. 9 in the present invention, it is preferred to use NF.sub.3 and F.sub.2 diluted to concentrations of from about 10% to about 50% in inert argon gas. The desired cleaning reactions produced by the use of the remote plasma source proceed without any ion bombardment of the chamber or substrate support structures, therefor; the need for cover wafers on the ESC 104, or periodic replacement of critical chamber assemblies is avoided. Thus, a much more efficient use and throughput of the system is provided." (paragraph 0125). Ishikawa teaches mixed Ar/F2 gases are conventionally used for cleaning and are conventionally ignited to form plasmas.

Therefore, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the invention was made to modify the process of Sorensen to include mixed Ar/F2 gases because Ishikawa teaches mixed Ar/F2 gases are conventionally used for cleaning and are conventionally ignited to form plasmas.

One of ordinary skill in the art would have been motivated to use mixed Ar/F2 gases when the nitrogen component in the plasma is not necessary for the effective cleaning of the chamber.

As to the ignition, pressure and flow conditions, as discussed above, in reference to claims 1-4, 6-8, 9-10, Sorensen and Ishikawa teach overlapping ranges for such parameters. Overlapping ranges are held obvious.

Claim Rejections - 35 USC § 103

4. Claims 31-32, 52, are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Sorensen et al. (US 2003/0129106) in view of Selbrede et al. (US 2002/0020429), Steinwandel et al. (US 5,782,085) and in view of Ishikawa et al. (US 2002/0000198) and further in view of Knipp (US 5,288,971).

5. Selbrede discloses “the power required to **ignite and sustain** a plasma in the Remote Plasma Cleaning (RPC) chamber 212 is a function of the pressure of the gas from which the plasma is generated, lowering the pressure within the RPC chamber 212 reduces the power required to sustain the plasma.” (paragraph 0048), including in an NF₃/ar mixture (paragraph 0070)(figure 12). Therefore, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the invention was made to modify the process of Sorensen to increase pressure after plasma ignition because Selbrede teaches the power required to **ignite and sustain** a plasma in the Remote Plasma Chamber (RPC) chamber 212 is a function of the pressure of the gas from which the plasma is generated, lowering the pressure within the RPC chamber 212 reduces the power required to sustain the plasma.

6. As discussed above Ishikawa teaches F2.

7. It is noted that Sorensen does not expressly disclose increasing the total pressure after ignition.

Knipp teaches “Ignition point (22) is a function of gas pressure, electrode spacing and size, and other chamber characteristics. The relationship between pressure and ignition voltage is referred to in the industry as a Paschen curve and is shown in FIG. 5.

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The Paschen voltage (14) decreases as pressure is decreased until it reaches a minimum value (13) which correlates to a certain pressure. Below this pressure, the Paschen voltage (14) again increases. Perhaps because the Paschen curve has been well studied, solutions utilizing **pressure increases** as in U.S. Pat. No. 4,906,811 are often utilized.” (column 5, line 12) . Selbrede clearly teaches lowering the pressure facilitates plasma ignition. Therefor, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the invention was made to modify the process of Sorensen to decrease the pressure in order to facilitate plasma ignition because Selbrede clearly teaches lowering the pressure facilitates plasma ignition, also, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the invention was made to increase the pressure back to the processing pressure after the plasma has been ignited since Steinwandel teaches that reducing pressure for the purpose of plasma ignition is a known plasma ignition scheme. Steinwandel teaches “It is furthermore possible to superimpose **a brief** high-frequency pulse (with a pulse width of about 1 msec) on the stationary excitation field **or to reduce pressure** in order to ignite the plasma (breakdown).” (column 5, line 55). The reference of Steinwandel is not relied on to teach plasma jet processing, but it is relied on to teach that temporarily reducing pressure or temporarily increasing the excitation field are known methods for facilitating plasma ignition.

One of ordinary skill in the art would have been motivated to ignite the plasma at a lower pressure in order to facilitate plasma ignition as suggested by Steinwandel.

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It would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the invention was made to modify the process of Sorensen to increase a total pressure of said mixed gas, after plasma ignition has been facilitated with reduced pressure, by increasing the flow in said gas passage to a second pressure while maintaining said plasma, said cleaning step cleaning said interior of said processing vessel at said second pressure because Selbrede teaches the power required to **ignite and sustain** a plasma in the Remote Plasma Cleaning (RPC) chamber 212 is a function of the pressure of the gas from which the plasma is generated.

One of ordinary skill in the art would have been motivated to increase the total pressure of the gas mixture back to the preferred operating processing pressure, after plasma ignition, in order to obtain higher active cleaning species density due to higher pressure which also means higher molecular active density in the processing region.

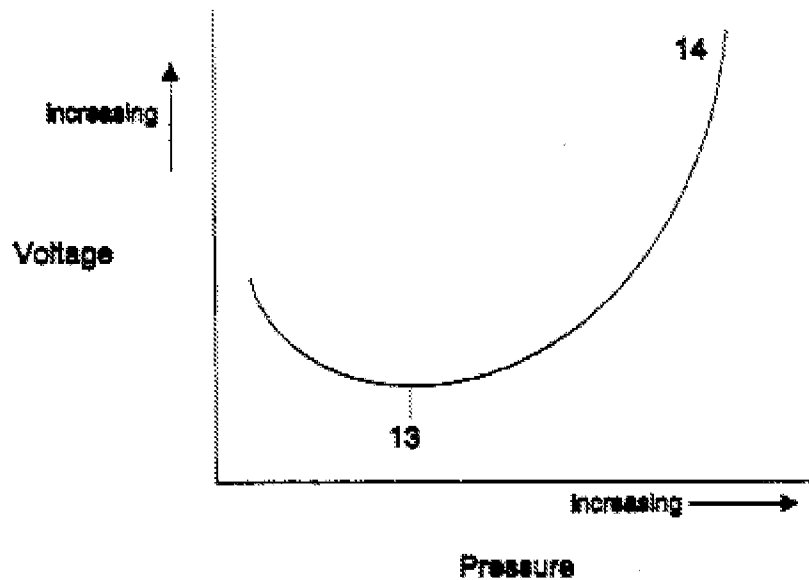


Figure 5

The reference of Knipp is not relied on to teach increasing pressure after plasma ignition, but Knipp is relied on to teach that, according to the Paschen curve, for every gas or gas mixture there is a minimum voltage for plasma ignition, this minimum depends on the pressure (and other parameters).

Therefore, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the invention was made to modify the process of Sorensen to perform plasma ignition at the pressure where the ignition voltage (power) is at minimum. One of ordinary skill in the art would have been motivated to choose minimum voltage plasma ignition in order to obtain a reliable ignition process avoiding higher ignition voltages

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which can lead to arcing and damaging the high frequency voltage circuit. Then, if the desirable plasma process pressure is at the right hand side (14) of minimum voltage ignition point (13) in figure 5 of Knipp, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the invention to increase the pressure from (13), after plasma ignition, to arrive at the desired process pressure (14).

Claim Rejections - 35 USC § 103

4. Claims 14-16 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Sorensen et al. (US 2003/0129106) in view of Selbrede et al. (US 2002/0020429), Steinwandel et al. (US 5,782,085) and Ishikawa et al. (US 2002/0000198) and further in view of Knipp (US 5,288,971).
5. It is noted that Sorensen does not expressly disclose increasing the total pressure after ignition.
6. Knipp teaches "Ignition point (22) is a function of gas pressure, electrode spacing and size, and other chamber characteristics. The relationship between pressure and ignition voltage is referred to in the industry as a Paschen curve and is shown in FIG. 5. The Paschen voltage (14) decreases as pressure is decreased until it reaches a minimum value (13) which correlates to a certain pressure. Below this pressure, the Paschen voltage (14) again increases. Perhaps because the Paschen curve has been well studied, solutions utilizing **pressure increases** as in U.S. Pat. No. 4,906,811 are often utilized." (column 5, line 12) .

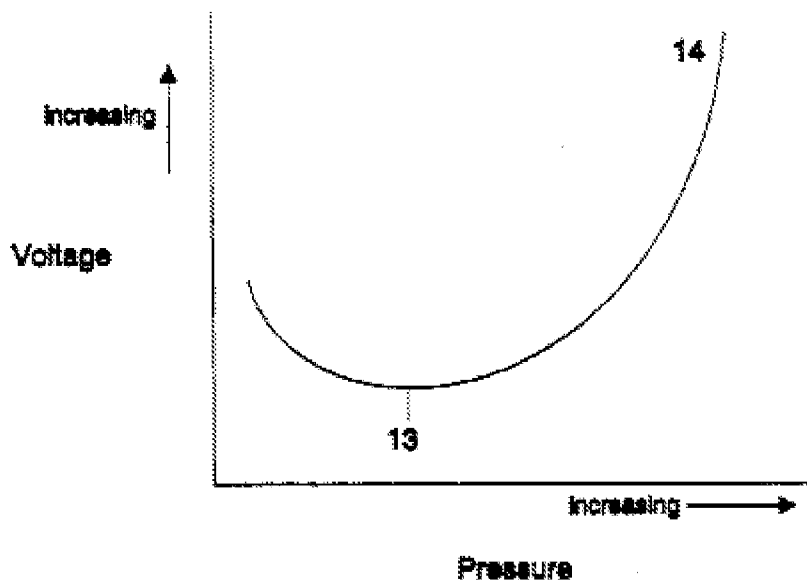


Figure 5

The reference of Knipp is not relied on to teach increasing pressure after plasma ignition, but Knipp is relied on to teach that, according to the Paschen curve, for every gas or gas mixture there is a minimum voltage for plasma ignition, this minimum depends on the pressure (and other parameters).

Therefore, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the invention was made to modify the process of Sorensen to perform plasma ignition at the pressure where the ignition voltage (power) is at minimum. One of ordinary skill in the art would have been motivated to choose minimum voltage plasma ignition in order to obtain a reliable ignition process avoiding higher ignition voltages

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which can lead to arcing and damaging the high frequency voltage circuit. Then, if the desirable plasma process pressure is at the right hand side (14) of minimum voltage ignition point (13) in figure 5 of Knipp, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the invention to increase the pressure from (13), after plasma ignition, to arrive at the desired process pressure (14). The the gas flows have been discussed above in reference to claims 9-10.

Claim Rejections - 35 USC § 103

Claims 34-46, 56-62, are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Sorensen et al. (US 2003/0129106) in view of Selbrede et al. (US 2002/0020429), Steinwandel et al. (US 5,782,085) and in view of Motley et al. (US 4,662,977) and Knipp (US 5,288,971).

Regarding claims 56-62 It is noted that Sorensen does not expressly disclose the gas flows and conductances as required by the claims, however, the references of Sorensen and Selbrede have been discussed above, Sorensen teaches, "Although the invention has been explained and illustrated in terms of embodiments that involved a PECVD system, the invention has far wider applicability. For example, the concept of a remote activation source (i.e., outside the main vacuum chamber), possibly used in conjunction with a local activation source (i.e., inside the main vacuum chamber) is useful in systems designed for the purposes of physical vapor deposition (PVD),

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chemical vapor deposition (CVD), ion doping, stripping of photoresist, substrate cleaning, **plasma etching**, and other purposes as well” (paragraph 0054). Sorensen clearly suggests using the same plasma generation apparatus for plasma etching application, NF₃/Ar gas mixture is an etching gas mixture conventionally used for silicon substrate etching as evidenced by Motley who teaches, in a downstream etching system, “To etch silicon nitride the admitted gas would comprise 85% CF₄ or C₂F₆, and the balance 10% **argon** and 5% oxygen: or for higher species **NF₃** or SF₆ may be substituted for CF₄ or C₂F₆.” (column 4, line 48) . Overlapping ranges are held obvious.

As to claims 34-40, Sorensen discloses “An electronically operated valve and flow control mechanism 54 controls the flow of gases from the gas supply 52 into the chamber 30. Also connected to the chamber 30 through an outlet port is a vacuum pump 56, which is used to evacuate the chamber and maintain a suitable vacuum pressure inside the chamber 30.” (paragraph 0030). Therefore, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the invention was made to control the pressure by controlling the gas flow and/or the pumping speed because gas flow represent the rate at which gas molecules are introduced into the system and pumping speed represent the rate at which gas molecules are evacuated from the system. One of ordinary skill in the art would have been motivated to control the gas pressure by controlling gas input and/or gas output to the system since gas flow meters and pumping throttle (control) valves are provided in any etching system, and are the most effective pressure control parameters. As to choosing the specific control scheme, one

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who is skilled in the art would be motivated to optimize through routine experimentation the proper pressure control scheme depending on the desired results. It has been held that the provision of adjustability, where needed, involves only routine skill in the art.

As to claim 41, as discussed above, Clearly Sorensen suggests NF₃ without argon is harder to ignite than an Ar/NF₃ gas mixture. In addition Selbrede teaches Ar/NF₃ gas flow ratio are conventionally known to be variable process parameter varying essentially from 0% to 100%.

As to claims 43-46, flow rates and pressure for ignition have been discussed above in reference to claims 1-10.

Claim Rejections - 35 USC § 103

7. Claims 47-48, 73, are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Sorensen et al. (US 2003/0129106) in view of Selbrede et al. (US 2002/0020429) and in view of Motley et al. (US 4,662,977) and Knipp (US 5,288,971).and further in view of of Ishikawa et al. (US 2002/0000198).

Sorensen discloses "For example, in a tungsten deposition system a fluorine compound gas is typically used to etch away tungsten deposited on the walls of the system to effect cleaning of those walls" (paragraph 052).

It is noted that Sorensen does not expressly disclose F₂ as the fluorine compound gas.

Ishikawa disclose "For the remote microwave cleaning system of FIG. 9 in the present invention, it is preferred to use NF₃ and F₂ diluted to concentrations

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of from about 10% to about 50% in inert argon gas. The desired cleaning reactions produced by the use of the remote plasma source proceed without any ion bombardment of the chamber or substrate support structures, therefor; the need for cover wafers on the ESC 104, or periodic replacement of critical chamber assemblies is avoided. Thus, a much more efficient use and throughput of the system is provided.” (paragraph 0125). Ishikawa teaches mixed Ar/F₂ gases are conventionally used for cleaning and are conventionally ignited to form plasmas.

Therefore, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the invention was made to modify the process of Sorensen to include mixed Ar/F₂ gases because Ishikawa teaches mixed Ar/F₂ gases are conventionally used for cleaning and are conventionally ignited to form plasmas.

One of ordinary skill in the art would have been motivated to use mixed Ar/F₂ gases when the nitrogen component in the plasma is not necessary for the effective cleaning of the chamber.

Response to Arguments

8. Applicant's arguments, filed 10/21/2008, with respect to the rejection(s) of all claim(s) under 35 USC § 103 have been fully considered and are persuasive in view of the fact that all the independent claims have been amended with the new limitation of increasing a total pressure after the step of plasma ignition. Therefore, the rejection has been withdrawn. However, upon further consideration, a new ground(s) of rejection is made in view of Steinwandel et al. (US 5,782,085). Steinwandel suggest the concept of

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temporarily decreasing or reducing the gas pressure for the purpose of facilitating plasma ignition, Steinwandel teaches "It is furthermore possible to superimpose **a brief** high-frequency pulse (with a pulse width of about 1 msec) on the stationary excitation field **or to reduce pressure** in order to ignite the plasma (breakdown)." (column 5, line 55). Since plasma breakdown or ignition is facilitated by a brief hi-frequency pulse or pressure reduction, it is clear that the pulse is lowered or the pressure is increased after this brief ignition procedure.

Conclusion

9. Applicant's amendment necessitated the new ground(s) of rejection presented in this Office action. Accordingly, **THIS ACTION IS MADE FINAL**. See MPEP § 706.07(a). Applicant is reminded of the extension of time policy as set forth in 37 CFR 1.136(a).

A shortened statutory period for reply to this final action is set to expire **THREE MONTHS** from the mailing date of this action. In the event a first reply is filed within **TWO MONTHS** of the mailing date of this final action and the advisory action is not mailed until after the end of the **THREE-MONTH** shortened statutory period, then the shortened statutory period will expire on the date the advisory action is mailed, and any extension fee pursuant to 37 CFR 1.136(a) will be calculated from the mailing date of the advisory action. In no event, however, will the statutory period for reply expire later than **SIX MONTHS** from the date of this final action.

.Any inquiry concerning this communication or earlier communications from the examiner should be directed to MAHMOUD DAHIMENE whose telephone number is (571)272-2410. The examiner can normally be reached on week days from 8:00 AM. to 5:00 PM..

If attempts to reach the examiner by telephone are unsuccessful, the examiner's supervisor, Nadine Norton can be reached on (571) 272-1465. The fax phone number for the organization where this application or proceeding is assigned is 571-273-8300.

Information regarding the status of an application may be obtained from the Patent Application Information Retrieval (PAIR) system. Status information for published applications may be obtained from either Private PAIR or Public PAIR. Status information for unpublished applications is available through Private PAIR only. For more information about the PAIR system, see <http://pair-direct.uspto.gov>. Should you have questions on access to the Private PAIR system, contact the Electronic Business Center (EBC) at 866-217-9197 (toll-free). If you would like assistance from a USPTO Customer Service Representative or access to the automated information system, call 800-786-9199 (IN USA OR CANADA) or 571-272-1000.

/M. D./
Examiner, Art Unit 1792

/Nadine G Norton/
Supervisory Patent Examiner, Art Unit 1792